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ABSTRACT

Communications technologies such as Web-based conferencing and chat are being used increasingly around the world by instructors and students in either face to face or distance learning courses. While some discuss the affects of this phenomena, others are more focused on how these technological tools can be used in specific courses to achieve desired learning outcomes. This article shares experiences in using electronic conferencing in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher education courses. It discusses strategies that have been used with electronic conferences, lessons learned, and implications for further research. Covered topics include instructional strategies for the WebBoard, WebBoard orientation, book reviews, chat rooms, and lessons learned. It is concluded that the technology involved remains only an enabler and facilitator of instruction. That all this can be meaningful and productive for the learner is a function of pedagogy; more specifically, skill in exploiting technology for language learning purposes and not of technology in and of itself. The WebBoard makes sharing and collaborating and engaging in high-level learning tasks feasible. The WebBoards not only facilitate learning, but they can redefine roles for the student and instructor, allowing students to be designers of their own learning by setting, regulating, and achieving goals that they have a large role in deciding. (A separate 6-page annex with screen captures is included.) (KFT)

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Preparing ESOL Teachers Using Web-Based Learning

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Preparing ESOL Teachers Using Web-Based Learning:
Strategies and Tactics

Communication technologies such as web-based conferencing and chat are being used increasingly around the world by instructors and students in either face-to-face or distance learning courses. Many discuss the impact and values of online conferencing and chat in teaching and learning (Gomez, 1995; Hoadley & His, 1995; Ruberg & Taylor, 1995). However, others are wondering how these technological tools can be used in specific courses to achieve desired learning outcomes. This article shares with the reader our experiences in using electronic conference in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. It discusses strategies we used with electronic conference, lessons we have learned, and implications for further research.

Electronic Conference and ESOL Endorsement Program

Computer-mediated communication tools such as electronic conference tools have been incorporated into the classroom to encourage reflection, learning, and thoughtful participation (Hoadley & His, 1995; Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1992). The virtual learning community supported by computer-mediated communication tools provides students with an environment in which they can meet peers and the instructor, explore ideas, and construct understanding of the content without the constrains of time and place. With electronic conferences, students can participate in the discussion or respond to questions at their own pace, taking the time to think and edit their responses, which is rarely possible in a live discussion. The technical and instructional advantages of computer-mediated communication tools have also been found to promote collaborative knowledge building and construction of shared knowledge artifacts (Gomez, 1995). Computer-mediated communication tools such as electronic conferences may provide students with a better understanding of the course content and multiple perspectives to issues, and many opportunities for individual knowledge construction (Zhu, 1998).

The teacher preparation program with ESOL endorsement at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) strives to prepare graduate students, teachers, and school personnel to teach and work with limited English proficient (LEP) students and /or English language

learners (ELL) in K-12 school environments. This includes teaching ELL/LEP students in mainstreamed setting and in pullout programs, as well as serving as advocates by sharing the information and knowledge gained with other professions working with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. The program consists of five courses: 1) Methods of Teaching ESOL; 2) Testing and Evaluation for ESOL Teachers; 3) Cross-cultural communication and Understanding for Teachers; 4) Curriculum and Materials Development in ESOL; and 5) Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition. In order to support the University's mission of increasing access to higher education not only in Southwest Florida but also beyond, it was decided that the ESOL endorsement program was to be offered via distance learning by the year 2000. The first course in the ESOL program was delivered via distance in Fall 1997 and the last course was offered in Fall 1999. The Internet and the WebBoard (O'Reilly, 1998) were the main technological tools used in delivering the ESOL distance learning courses.

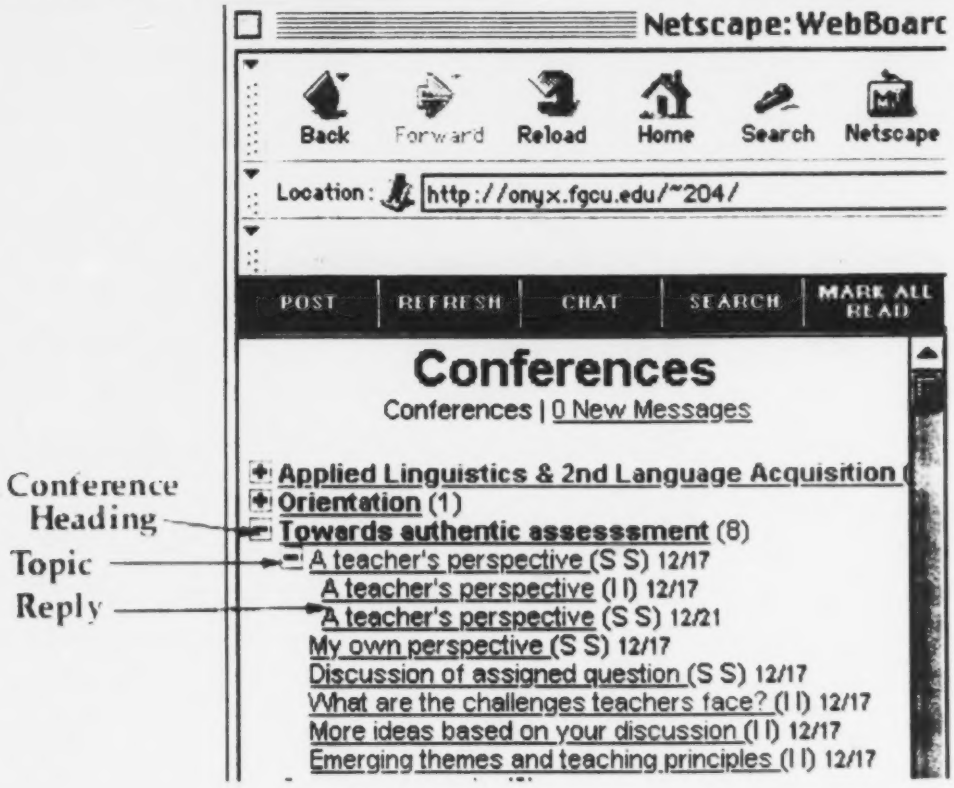
Instructional Strategies for the WebBoard

WebBoard (O'Reilly, 1998) software is a web-based conference and chat program. It provides the user with various features such as customizable web conference and conference management, users' participation, and other statistics. Such features are essential for creating and maintaining a virtual learning community. The WebBoard was used on a weekly basis for asynchronous class discussions and for individual assignments. To promote a user-friendly environment, active links to the WebBoard were created throughout the course's web-components.

WebBoard Orientation

On the WebBoard, conferences are categorical headings for the various weekly course assignments and activities. For instance, among the earliest conferences used by the students was a "technology orientation" conference. When students opened the conference they found several "topics" within the conference. Topics are conference-subheadings, which helped categorize and organize student assignments and responses. During week one, students were asked to introduce themselves by answering several questions about themselves, each question being asked in a separate sub-conference topic. As students posted their replies, the WebBoard visibly took on the form of an "outline", with the

WebBoard conference being a "major heading", the topic being the first level subheading and student replies the third-level heading (See Figure 1).



In the technology orientation conference, students learned how to use the WebBoard, posting a message and replying to a message. Students then tried to post messages from the computers that they will use throughout the course. If problems occur, they can be solved before the course progresses into the content learning phase. Exercises in the orientation session were designed to ensure that students read each other's postings to the introduction questions and then to begin modeling asynchronous discussion by posting replies to each other's answers. The technology orientation was very successful in helping students get ready technically and psychologically.

Weekly Discussion

Following the orientation, there were some leading questions for discussion posted each week, either by the instructor or a student (a session leader). The WebBoard discussion is intended to help students make a connection between theory and practice and

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guide them in constructing knowledge. The discussion provides them with an authentic learning environment where students can reflect on their own teaching practices, explore new practices/ideas, sharing with one another, and build a repertoire of best teaching practices and tips for classroom use with English language learners. The discussion also allows students to set up their own learning goals and assume responsibility for their own learning.

Discussion Session Leader

For each week's discussion, a student was selected as the discussion leader. As a discussion session leader, he or she led, moderated, and summarized the discussion on the WebBoard toward the end of the week. The activity of a session leader forces students to engage in higher level of thinking skills, such as summarizing and synthesizing. It creates a student-centered learning environment rather than teacher-directed. In the student-centered learning environment, the student can choose issues relevant to their teaching and professional development and set weekly discussion goals. The instructor was there to guide students and facilitate their learning. For the first discussion session, the instructor performed all the tasks required of the students. Being a session leader, a student has the opportunity to practice such skills as setting discussion topics, goals, encouraging other students to participate in a timely manner, and bringing a closure to the discussion. Being a discussion leader makes a student aware of the process of starting a discussion and bringing it to a closure. The awareness of the process enables students to have a holistic view of learning and understand how new knowledge and understanding is constructed, which in turn will benefit them in teaching at schools.

Book Reviews on the WebBoard

Book review is a very popular learning activity for students in face-to-face classes. Book review usually requires students to read a book and then share the review with the class. The WebBoard adds dynamics to the face-to-face book review activity. Each student selects a book to review and posts the review on the WebBoard. A student's book review includes not only the review, but also resources about the book in various media formats and in hyperlinks. When other students read the book review, they can also see a list of relevant books and resources for the book. They can easily click on any of these links to view the online resources, which can be presented in text, graphic or other media formats. While

reading a student's book review, others can freely respond to the review and ask further questions. Thus the online book review is no longer a simple book review activity, but a powerful and interactive information sharing and resource gathering activity.

Chat Room

The built-in chat room in the WebBoard adds synchronicity to the communication on the WebBoard. The synchronous chat session resembles the most of a face-to-face classroom interaction. The chat sessions were used as short discussion sessions by the instructor in the ESOL courses. "Chats" were mainly used as a way for clarifying students' questions and online office hours in which students can come to the chat room and ask questions regarding the course. The chat room was also used by students when they were collaborating on group projects. The synchronous chat requires students to be present at the same time though at different locations. This creates some scheduling and technical problems. It is very hard to coordinate a time when every one in the course can be online and it is even hard to stay online throughout the chat session without encountering any technical problems. Furthermore, to make a discussion or a chat effective, the instructor will have to moderate the discussion or conversation. Without moderation, a chat session usually does not yield any useful results.

Lessons Learned

The strategies (weekly discussion, online book review, session leader, and chat) used for the WebBoard in ESOL courses were highly successful with the exception of the chat. The chat room sessions were not as productive as expected. Students had problems in logging onto the chat room at the same time and staying logged on throughout the chat session because of the unstable Internet connections. Once a student is cut off from a chat session, he/she loses all the discussion threads even if he/she re-logs on again a few minutes later. The disruption of conversation in the chat room poses serious threats to comprehending the conversation happened in the chat room. This is much like a live conversation in a classroom. If you leave the room and come back again, you feel disconnected with the conversation and can't make sense of the conversation because you missed part of it. In order to hold an effective chat room discussion, every student needs to have a stable and reliable Internet connection. Though the synchronicity of a chat room

theoretically offsets the lack of face-to-face interaction in distance learning courses, the technical problems with the chat has made it difficult for students and the instructor to take this advantage. On the other hand, it is very important to have guiding rules for any synchronous online activities. The rules help organize the online activity and avoid any chaotic situations. For the asynchronous activities on the WebBoard, instructions on how to carry certain activity are essential for students. From our experience in designing and delivering web-based courses, we strongly suggest that the instruction for each activity be developed before the course is delivered and the course design and development be completed prior to the delivery. Once the semester begins all the information including all the activities, learning events, and instructions needs to be online so that the instructor will have time and energy to facilitate student learning during the semester.

Conclusion and Implications

The WebBoard as used in the ESOL courses plays an important role in students learning in Web-based instruction. However, the significant contribution of WebBoard toward student learning in the ESOL courses can not be attributed solely to the technology -- WebBoard. The WebBoard makes sharing and collaborating, engaging in high level learning tasks feasible, the instructional events make these tasks meaningful and productive. The WebBoard not only facilitates students' learning in the ESOL courses, but also re-define roles for the student and the instructor in the teaching and learning process. When engaging in learning tasks on the WebBoard, students' traditional way of learning is redefined. Students are designers of their own learning, setting, regulating, and achieving learning goals. Individual students reflect on specific topics from their own perspectives, collaborating with peers, and constructing knowledge based on previous experiences and understanding. Reflector, collaborator, and self-regulator are the emerging descriptors of students in web-based learning environments. For instructors, the traditional way of delivering instruction is also redefined. Instructors are facilitators who design instruction in a way that engage students in active learning. Instructors are mentors who monitor students and guide them through the learning process. Instructors are also coaches who model for students, scaffold the cognitive process of learning, and lead them to their learning goals.

Facilitator, coach, and mentor are the emerging descriptors of instructors engaging in web-based instruction.

After integrating the WebBoard into the ESOL courses, we believe that WebBoard is a powerful learning and teaching tool. The technical skills students gained from using the WebBoard and new role students assume in the teaching and learning process better prepare them to teach in the digital age. However, the power of this tool relies on the careful design of instructional strategies and the instructional activities. WebBoard has made effective learning and teaching a possibility, but instructional strategies make it a reality. We have designed a few useful instructional activities for the WebBoard. We hope the strategies can become a springboard for the birth of more strategies to guide the effective use of electronic conference in learning and teaching.

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Biographical Statement

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Dr. Vázquez-Montilla is an Associate Professor at Florida Gulf Coast University and teaches diversity and ESOL courses in undergraduate and graduate programs. Web-based and distance learning experiences include the development and teaching of 5 Internet ESOL courses. Research and interests include teacher education, culturally diverse families, and monitoring academic performance.

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Dr. Zhu is an instructional consultant at Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan. Her recent publications include "Design Web-Based Instruction: A Human-Computer Interaction Perspective" (in *Web-Based Instruction* , Khan, ed.1997) and "Learning and Mentoring: Electronic Discussion in a Distance-learning Course" (in *Electronic collaborators: Learner-centered technologies...*, Bonk, & King, (Eds.), 1998).

Preparing ESOL Teachers Using Web-Based Learning

TESOL 2000

Navigating the New Millennium

March 17, 2000

Elia Vázquez-Montilla, Ph.D.
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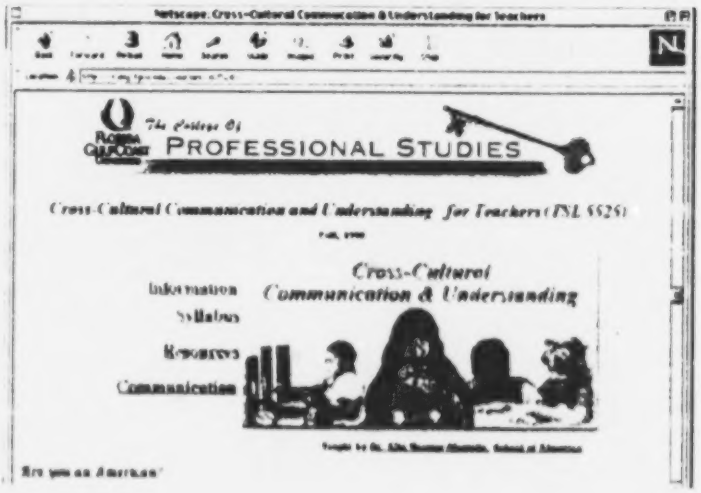
Florida Gulf Coast University

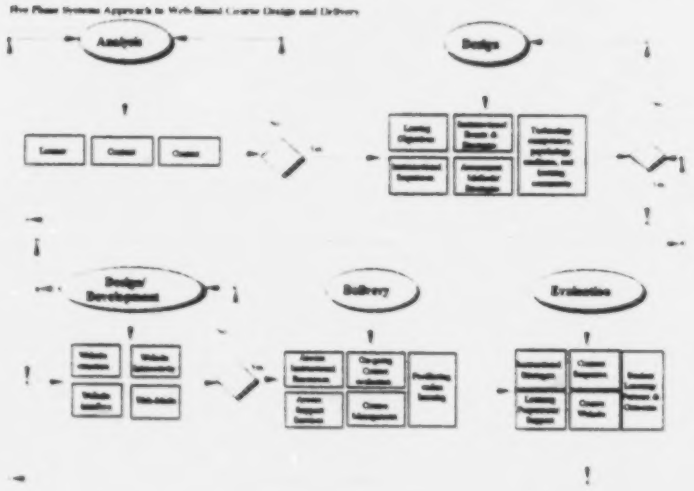
Florida's ESOL Endorsement Requirements for Teachers

- Methods of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Testing and Evaluation for ESOL Teachers
- Curriculum and Materials Development in ESOL Programs
- Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition
- Cross-cultural Communication and Understanding for Teachers

Case of Cross-Cultural Communication and Understanding for Teachers



Five Phase Systems Approach to Web-Based Course Design and Delivery



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What is a WebBoard?

- Web-based conferencing or discussion program/software
- Asynchronous web-based discussion and synchronous chat
- Public, private, and read-only conference
- Hierarchical structure of a board

WebBoard

Board
Conference
Topic
Message

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WebBoard Design: Personal Views of Learning

- Our views of learning determine the strategies used with the class
  - e.g. collaborative, student-centered, reflective, knowledge construction and previous experiences
    http://onyx.fgcu.edu/~83
- Traditional views of learning
  - face-to-face, lectures, weekly meetings

WebBoard Discussion Strategies: Facilitating Online Learning

- Questions (knowledge-construction, collaborative learning)
- Session Leader (student-centered learning)
- Book Review (student-centered learning)
- Survey (intended to be pre and post knowledge tests)
- Chat Room

Chatting...

- Synchronous communication
- All participate at same time ("real time")
- Not required as part of grading scale
- Used for on-line office hours
- Used for clarification of course requirements
- Used to discuss course topic of the week
- Resembles face-to-face interaction
- Later chats became more personal
- Chat became a ritual for about half the class

Lessons Learned: Course Design and Delivery

- Challenges to distance learning (learners)
  - technology savvy and equipment compatibility
  - different learning styles/diverse learners
- Challenges to distance learning (teachers)
  - Time-consuming to design a course
  - Time-consuming to deliver a course (tremendous amount of time spent in guiding students' learning on the WebBoard)

Lessons Learned: Roles of Students and Educators

- Students
  - active participant in own learning
  - reflector
  - collaborator
  - self-regulator
- Educators
  - facilitator
  - coach (inspire, engage, monitor, supervise, and exchange)
  - model
  - mediator

Implications

- Course implementation and delivery
  - Need for technology orientation
  - Need for on going technology support
  - Need to plan ahead
  - Course management
- Student learning
  - Strengthen the connection between knowledge and practice
  - Provides opportunity for in depth in reflection in the construction of knowledge
  - Powerful tool for the development of a learning community